Oral Histories of Designers: Rethinking the historical, theoretical and international foundations of Finnish design

Kärt Summatavet, Doctor of Arts

Member of Board, Estonian Association of Designers
Founder and researcher, Estonian Memory Bank
kart.summatavet@gmail.com

Leena Svinhufvud, PhD

Educational Curator, Design Museum Helsinki Adjunct Professor in Art History, University of Helsinki Leena.svinhufvud@designmuseum.fi

Leena Svinhufvud, Kärt Summatavet

Design Museum Helsinki, Finland Estonian Association of Designes, Estonia

Oral Histories of Designers: Rethinking the historical, theoretical and international foundations of Finnish design

Contemporary theories in design history underline the value of information produced within the profession. Oral history has become a significant methodology for understanding creative practitioners and also the missing history of art education. Oral history has suggested new methods for research also for design history (Sandino, 2013; Oral Histories and Design: Objects and Subjects, 2006).

Despite the eminent national and international recognition of Finnish design the historical development of this post-WWII success story and the hagiography spun around it has been surprisingly little exposed to research. Even less the educational system, ideologies and models that laid the foundation for the professional practice. Our research project uses oral history as a means to reconstruct design history from "beyond" and to study the professional, ideological and philosophical groundings of Finnish design basing on interviews of designers.

In a set of interviews conducted in 2013-14 in the Aalto University, Helsinki we focused on processes how educational programmes have developed and individual designer identities were constructed (Summatavet & Svinhufvud, 2013). The interviews of designers who started their studies in late 1960s and early 1970s problematize the construction of a designer identity, motifs and missions. We claim, that there is a collective Finnish concept and understanding of a modern designer identity that is built upon common education (one school) and especially on the aesthetic principles of composition. Through the art subjects and especially the mandatory subject of composition (general composition) a universal set of design rules were planted, a basis whereupon specific professional tuition was added. We propose that this gave a general platform and understanding to students, future professionals.

- IOHA 2018 MEMORY & NARRATION, THE XX INTERNATIONAL ORAL HISTORY ASSOCIATION CONFERENCE, UNIVERSITY OF JYVÄSKYLÄ, FINLAND -

Our presentation

- Interview project of Finnish designers (1989-1991)
- Estonian Memory Bank (2013-2118)





helsinki







Oral history

Alessandro Portelli:

... performance-oriented *narrative*, content-oriented *document*, subject-oriented *life story*, and theme-oriented *testimony*

Portelli, A. (1998). Oral History as Genre. In *Narrative and Genre*. M. Chamberlain, P. Thompson (Eds.). London, New York: Routledge.

Linda **Sandino**:

Oral histories are situated dialogues and the contexts of their production need to be understood in order to explore their meanings: how values and ideologies are constructed, challenged, or sustained

Sandino, L. (2013). Introduction. Oral history *in* and *about* art, craft, and design. In *Oral History in the Visual Arts*. Linda Sandino, Matthew Partington (Eds). London, Berg, 2013.

Research of professional, ideological and philosophical groundings of Finnish design basing on interviews of designers

Finnish Design is a widely known concept

- oral history as a means to reconstruct Finnish design history from "beyond"

Interview as method: getting information or something more?

Interview project of Finnish designers (1989-1991): documenting life histories of "old generation" designers > "information"

model taken from interview projects of Finnish architects and writers

Interviews in 2013-2014: "Deep interview" method developed and used by Kärt Summatavet

- repetition and coming back: challenging the interviewees to rethink their histories
- enhancing dialogue: interview process as rethinking history
- mental patterns

Oral history

Linda Sandino:

Interviews may draw on a variety of **already told versions** and so a construction is always **re-construction**, forever subject to **re-tellings**, or rather **reconfigurations** providing the opportunity to

think again, or think differently about the past.

Sandino, L. (2013). Introduction. Oral history *in* and *about* art, craft, and design. In *Oral History in the Visual Arts*. Linda Sandino, Matthew Partington (Eds). London, Berg, p. 10

University of Art and Design (founded in 1871 as Craft School, university status 1971)

- Aalto University (2010-), Helsinki/Espoo, Finland
- big changes in the university; "end" of independent university of design and art
- documentation of retiring designer-teachers

Interviewees

5 designer-teachers, 1 art historian, 2 members of staff (university government) 3 men, 5 women born between 1946–1950

Method: "elämäkerrallinen syvähaastattelu"

biographical deep interview

- focus on University of Art and Design
- the student years there
- work as teachers and staff



Kärt Summatavet & Leena Svinhufvud: Oral Histories of Designers
IOHA 2018 MEMORY & NARRATION, UNIVERSITY OF JYVÄSKYLÄ, FINLAND, JUNE 18–21, 2018



Where and how have the teacher-designers formed their methods? - personal "design philosophy"

Can we learn more about the processes of knowledge building?

- development of values and "identity" as designer

Finding "landmarks" in oral histories of designers

- shared concepts of important events: experience of break / change
- "kliché" of design history < > personal interpretation and meaning

"Rethinking the historical, theoretical and international foundations of Finnish design"

Article about the 1970s in the University of Art and Design

- "politizised years"
- cultural break of the 1960s: new "culture" in the school, new content in education (design)
- > towards concept of social design

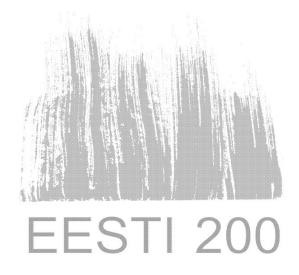
Published paper:

Kärt Summatavet, Leena Svinhufvud 2014. **Takaisin 1970-luvulle – taideteollisuuden opettajahaastattelut muotoiluhistorian lähteenä**(Back to the 70s - interviews of designer-teachers as source of design history TAHITI Taidehistoria tieteenä 3/2014 **www.tahiti.fi** (in Finnish)





Estonian Memory Bank (2013-2118)



To study the professional, ideological and philosophical groundings of Estonian design basing on interviews of designer



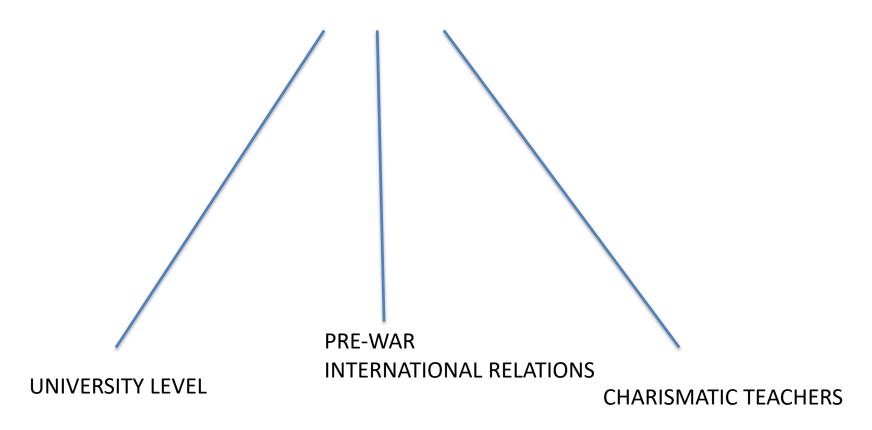
ESTONIA 200

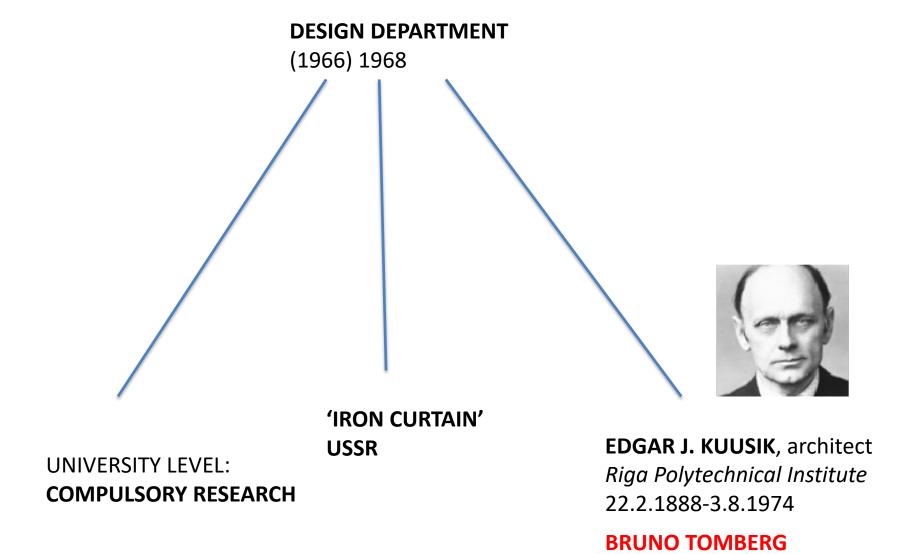
professional, ideological and philosophical groundings

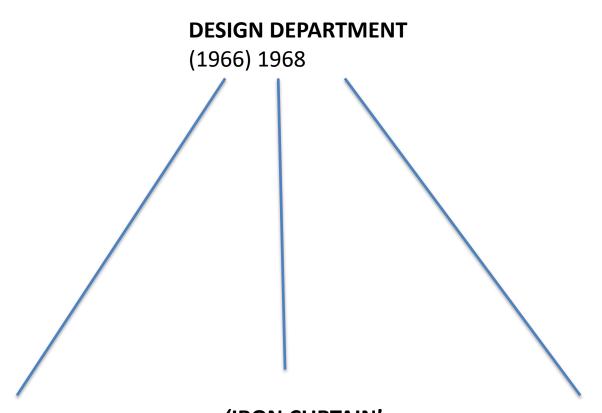
50 volunteers
more than 180 interviews
more than 700 hours
time schedule – 100 years

FIRST STEP

DESIGN EDUCATION









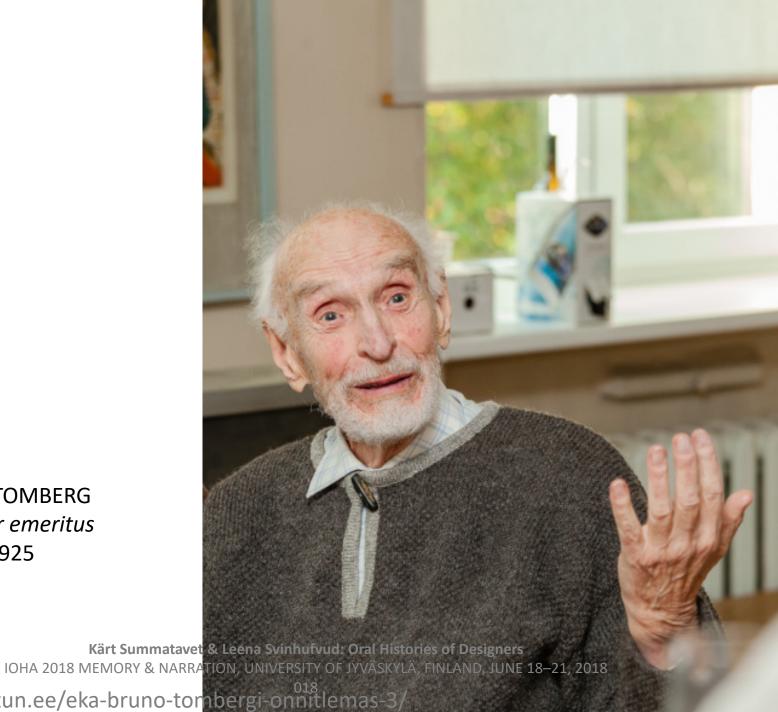
UNIVERSITY LEVEL:

COMPULSORY RESEARCH OBLIGATION

POSTGRADUATE DISSERTATIONS

Repin Institute – Leningrad (since 1956) Stroganov – Moscow (since 1960s) **EDGAR J. KUUSIK**, architect *Riga Polytechnical Institute* 22.2.1888-3.8.1974

BRUNO TOMBERG 29.3.1925



BRUNO TOMBERG professor emeritus b. 29.3.1925

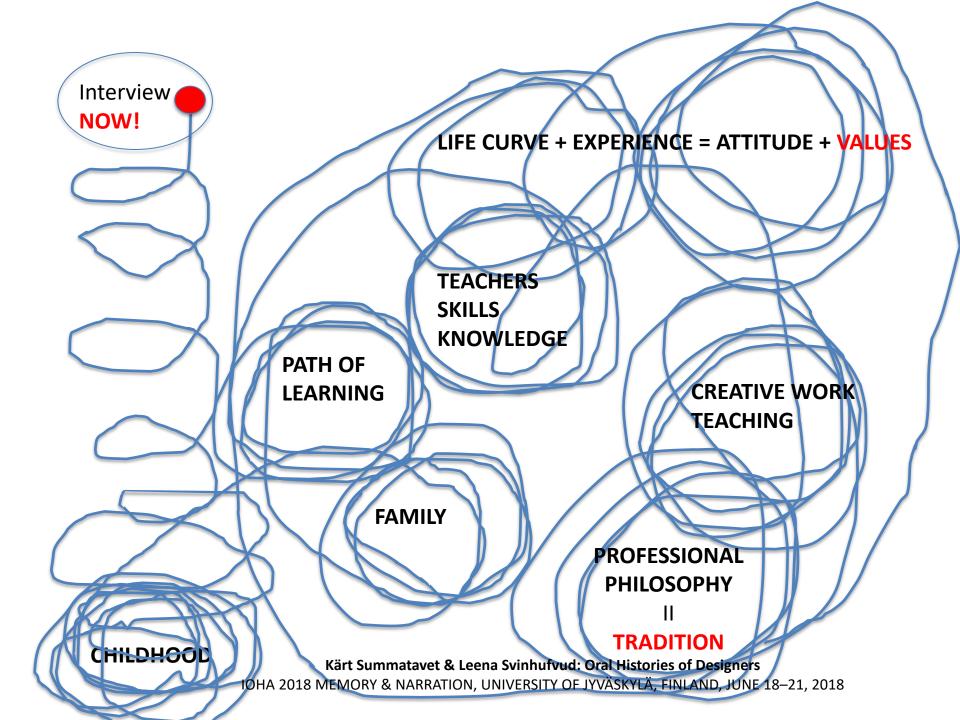
http://www.artun.ee/eka-bruno-tombergi-onnitlemas-3/

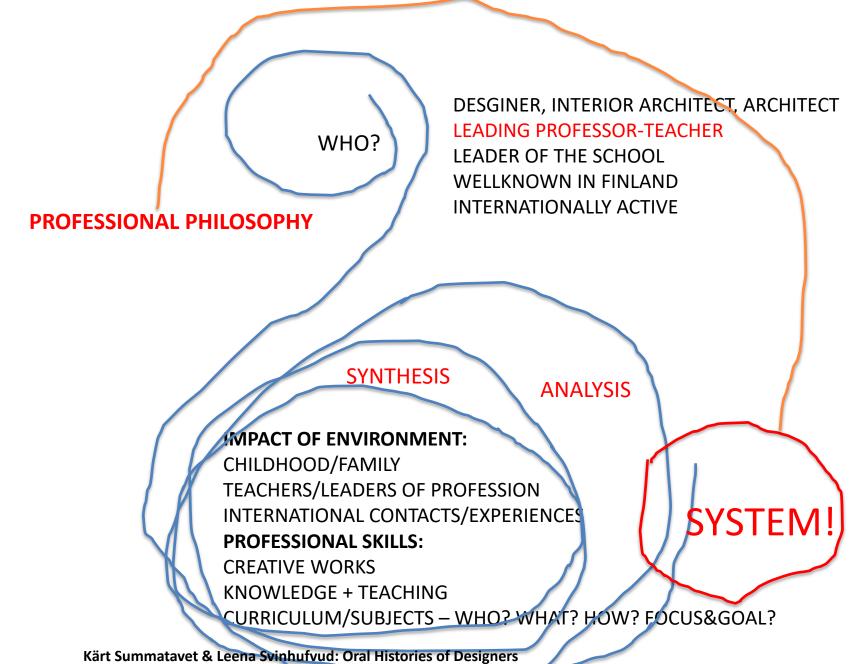
3. Bruno Tomberg's phenomenon

Tomberg used Bauhaus's curriculum of general composition, which he developed into a unique and internationally noted curriculum on the basis of abstract art and various colour and form exercises.



Archive data ... interviews, visual recordings





IOHA 2018 MEMORY & NARRATION, UNIVERSITY OF JYVÄSKYLÄ, FINLAND, JUNE 18–21, 2018



MAPPING OF THE PROFESSIONAL PHILOSOPHY

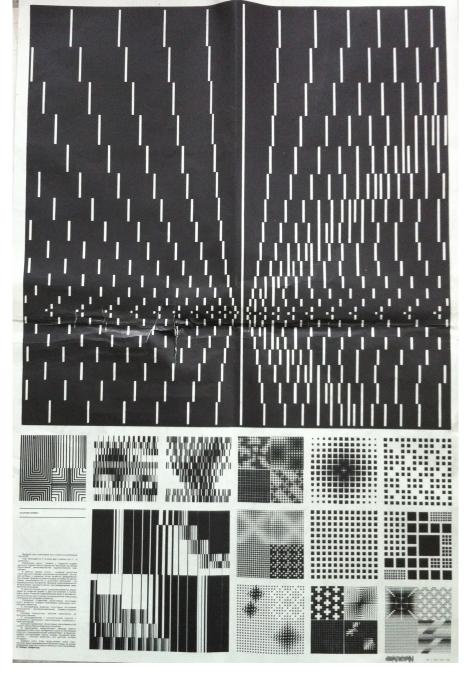
DIALOGIC FIELDWORK METHOD (Lauri Honko)

- CHILDHOOD how did you feel? what happened?
- FAMILY parents, grandparents impact of environment, skills, knowledge...?
- HOW DID YOU KNOW ABOUT THIS SCHOOL/PROFESSION?
- HOW DID YOU PREPARE FOR ENTRANCE TESTS?
- Content of entrance tests? WHY?
- What did you LEARN NAME SUBJECTS... I, II, II, IV, V, VI year?
- Who were your TEACHERS? where did THEY STUDY?
- **AIM of each subject**: what did you learn/obtain?
- AIMS OF YOUR TEACHERS: skills, training, mental patterns

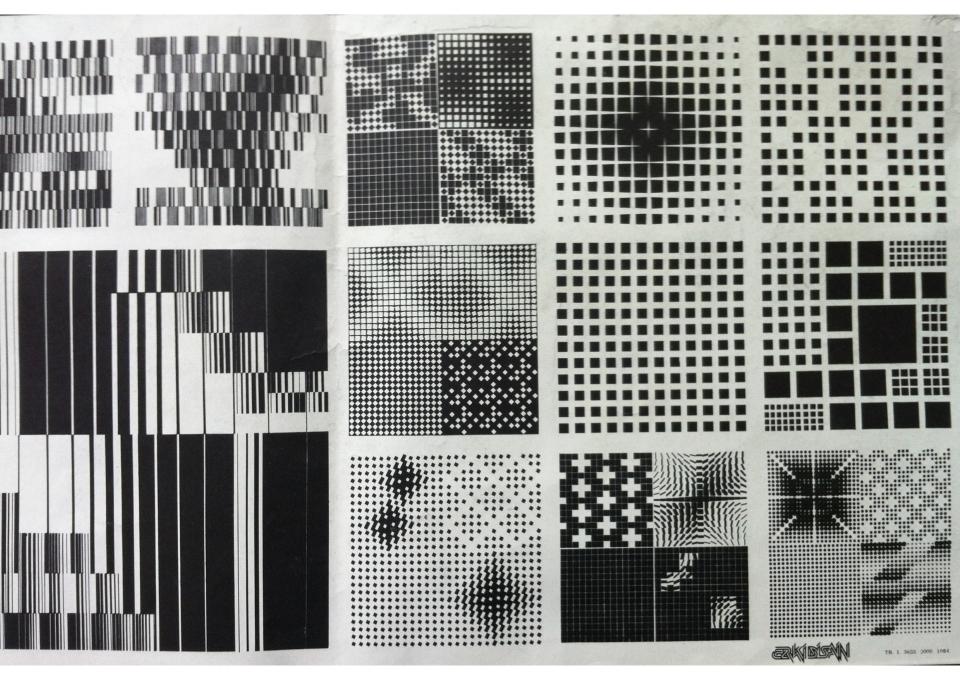
+ important themes/memories appear in the process



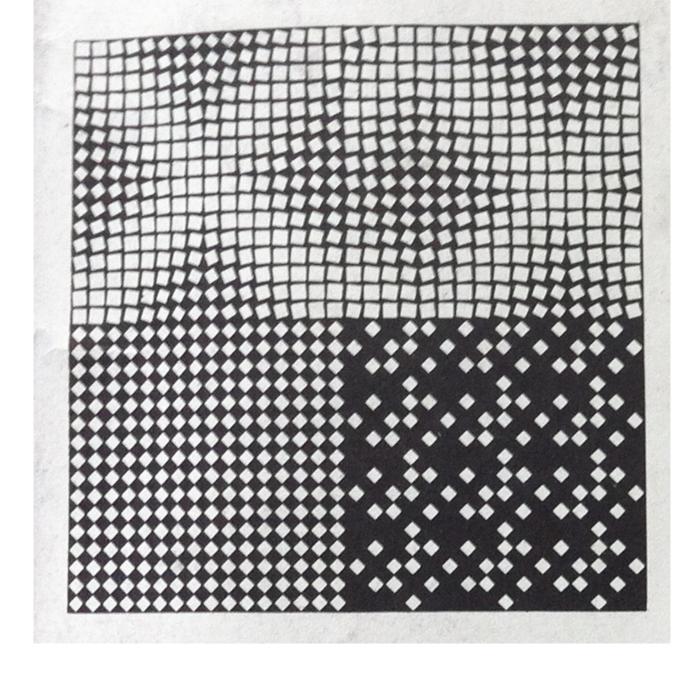
2. Formation of Design department

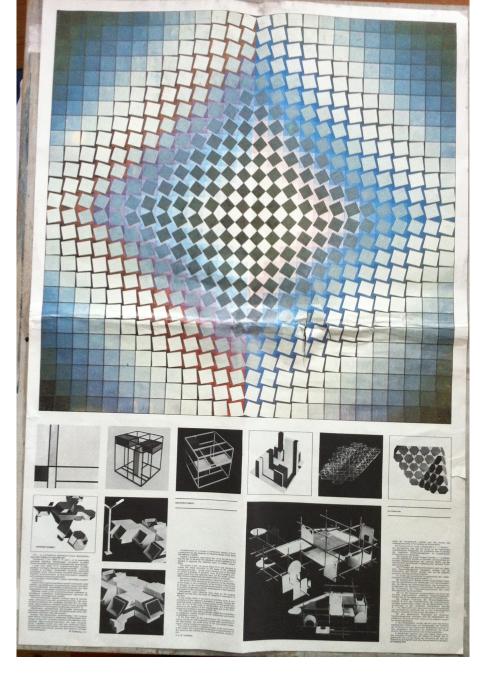


IOHA 2018 MEMORY & NARRATION, UNIVERSITY OF JYVÄSKYLÄ, FINLAND, JUNE 18–21, 2018

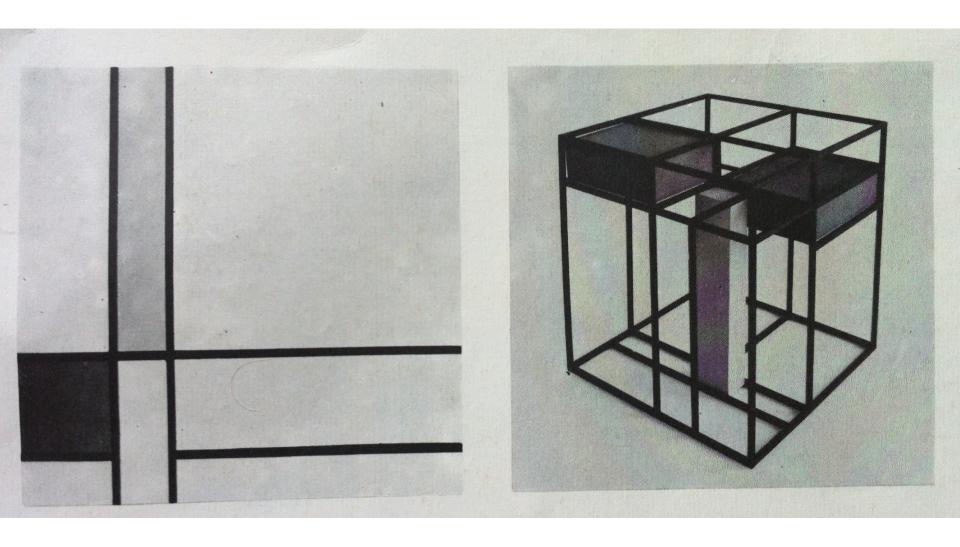


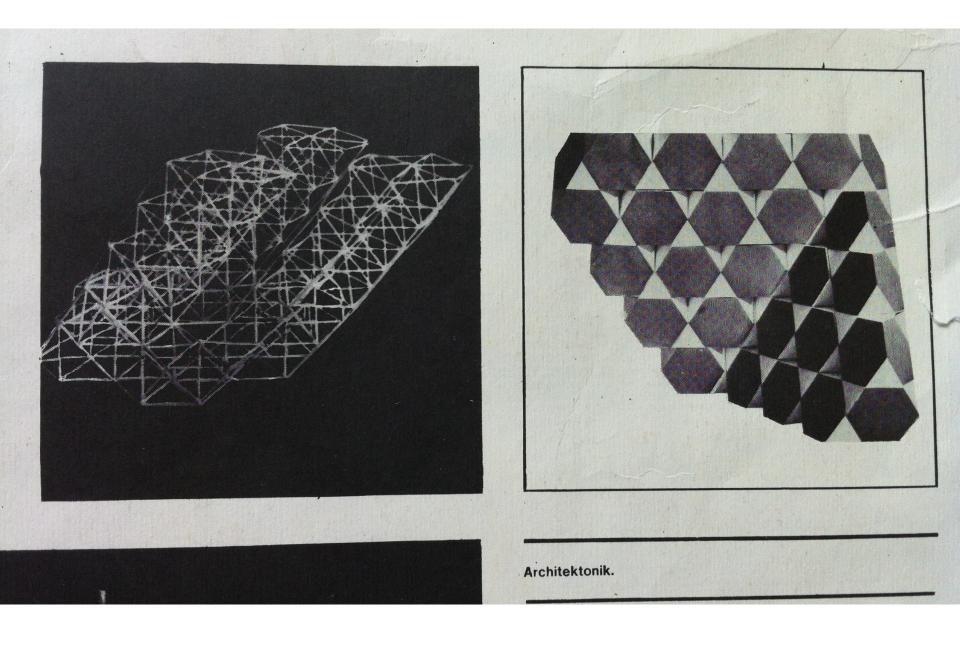
IOHA 2018 MEMORY & NARRATION, UNIVERSITY OF JYVÄSKYLÄ, FINLAND, JUNE 18–21, 2018

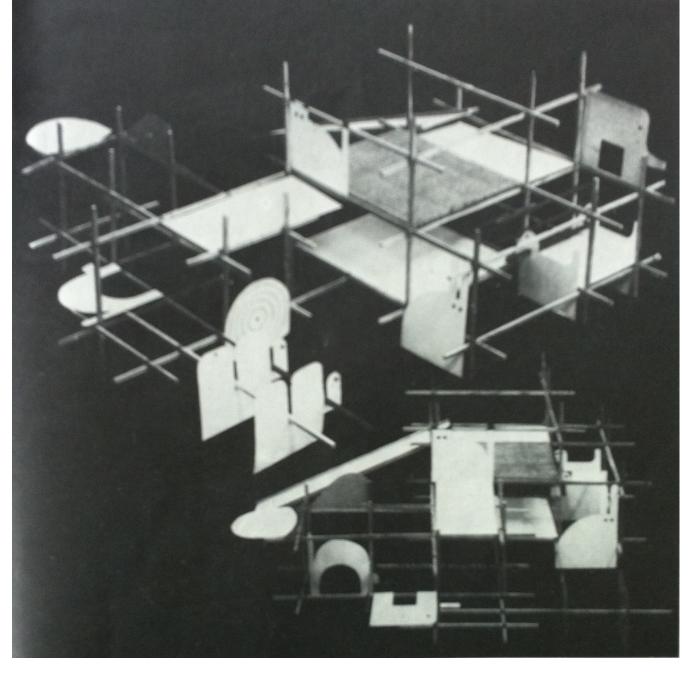




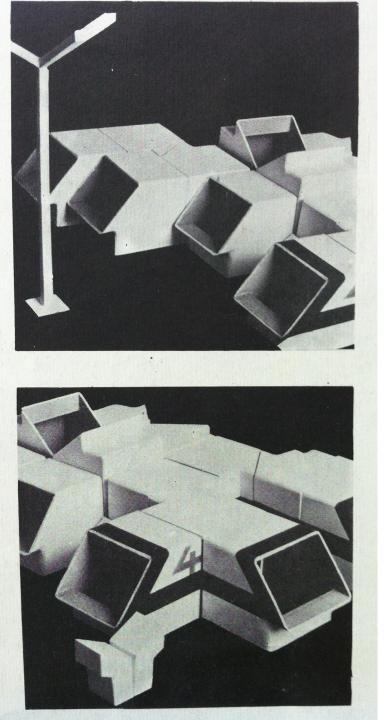
IOHA 2018 MEMORY & NARRATION, UNIVERSITY OF JYVÄSKYLÄ, FINLAND, JUNE 18–21, 2018



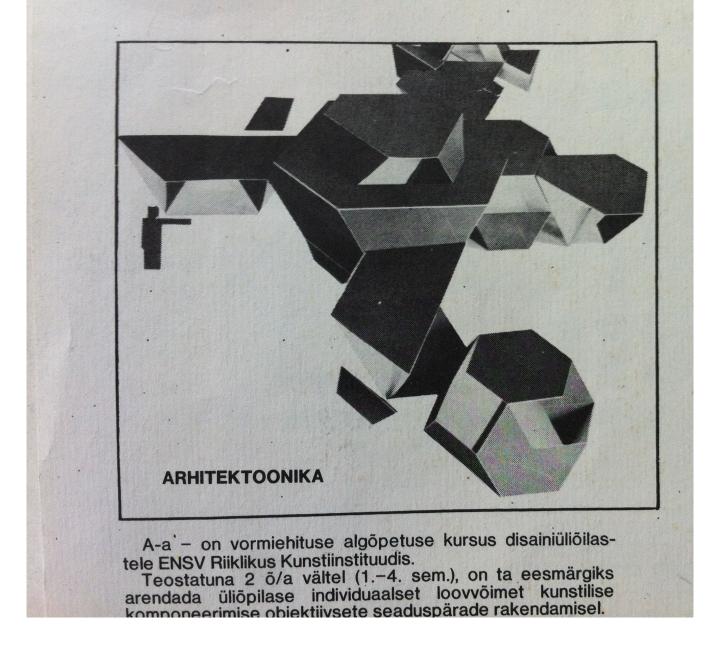




IOHA 2018 MEMORY & NARRATION, UNIVERSITY OF JYVÄSKYLÄ, FINLAND, JUNE 18–21, 2018



IOHA 2018 MEMORY & NARRATION, UNIVERSITY OF JYVÄSKYLÄ, FINLAND, JUNE 18–21, 2018



ERKI DISAIN 1981

Catalogue

14 years later

Vajadus näha tehtut kaugemalt kui igapäeva lähiperspektiivist kutsus esile käesoleva ürituse — näituse ja kataloogi. Asjaolul, et tööstuskunsti kateeder loodi ENSV Riikliku Kunstiinstituudi juures 11 aasta eest, on ainult formaalne tähendus, sest esimesed üliõpilased võeti vastu juba 1966. aastal, seega 14 aastat tagasi ja see pole teadagi pühitsetav ajatähis.

Tagasihoidlikum pruuk eeldaks, et selle ajaga kateedris tehtut hinnataks kui tingimuste ja asjaolude võimaldatut. Tahaksin siiski selle asemel öelda veendumusega, et oleme teinud mida ja kuidas oleme tahtnud ja õigeks pidanud, olles piiratud vaid oma disainialaste teadmiste, oskuste ja ettevalmistatuse tasemest. Oleme ju enamikus väljaspoolt disainitulijad, kes ala vastu huvi ja vastutust tundes asusime õpetamisega samaaegselt ise õppima disaini kutsealaseid oskusi.

Kõneldes «meist» pean võrdselt silmas nii pedagooge kui üliõpilasi. Õppimine võib olla ühepoolne tegevus, õpetamine mitte ja disainikateedri praeguseks kujunemiseks on üliõpilaste osa olnud samavõrdne õppejõudude omaga: õpilaste valmisolek teadmiste vastuvõtuks ja nõudlikkus nende taotlemisel on andjaile olnud pidevaks teadmiste kokkukandmise ja edastamiseks valmiduse stiimuliks. Võttes kokku 14 aasta vältel tehtud tööd — 9 lendu 79 lõpetanuga, võib märkida tegevusalade ulatust ja ülesannete laiust, milles disainerid on osunud tegelema: kunstnikena tööstustes, erikonstrueerimisbüroodes, reklaami-

ja näitusekujundusel, linnakujunduses, teatri- ja filmikujundusel, teabelevi — (TV) kujundusel, kujutava kunsti ja muudel aladel.

On jatkunud jõudu asuda organisatoorselt juhtivaisse ja vastutavaisse ülesannetesse peakunstnikena, juhtivate konstruktoritena jms.

Tahaksin, et näitus olemasolevate disainijõudude ülevaatusena ja esitatud tulemused pälvivad ja õigustavad üldnimetuse «ERKIDISAIN» andmise nähtusele, mille sünnis ja arengus me ühiselt oleme osalenud.

Browner

BRUNO TOMBERG professor, Eesti NSV Riikliku Kunstiinstituudi tööstuskunsti kateedri juhataja









Udo Ivask



Bruno Vesterberg



Jaak Soans



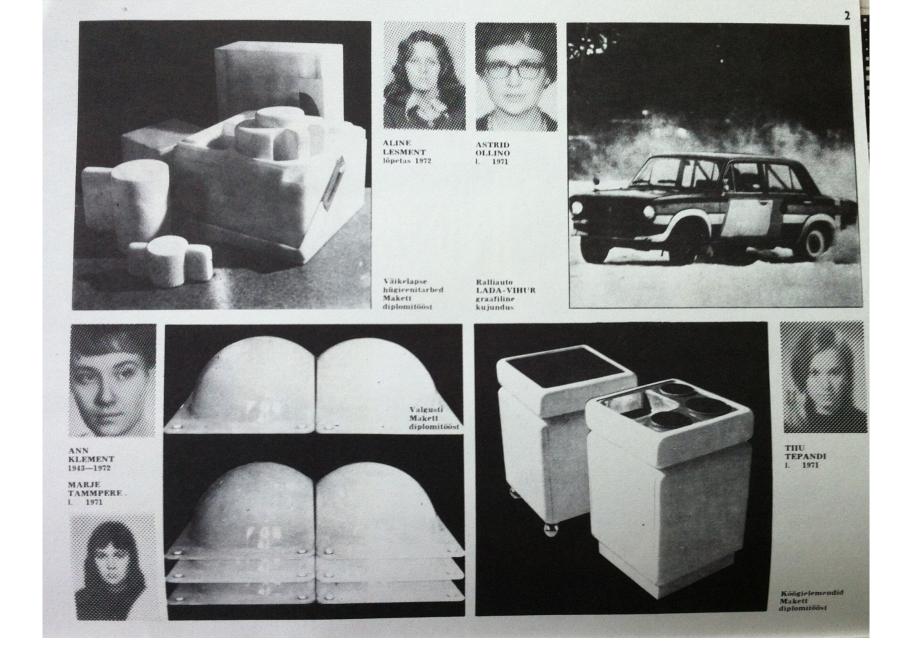
Mait Summatavet



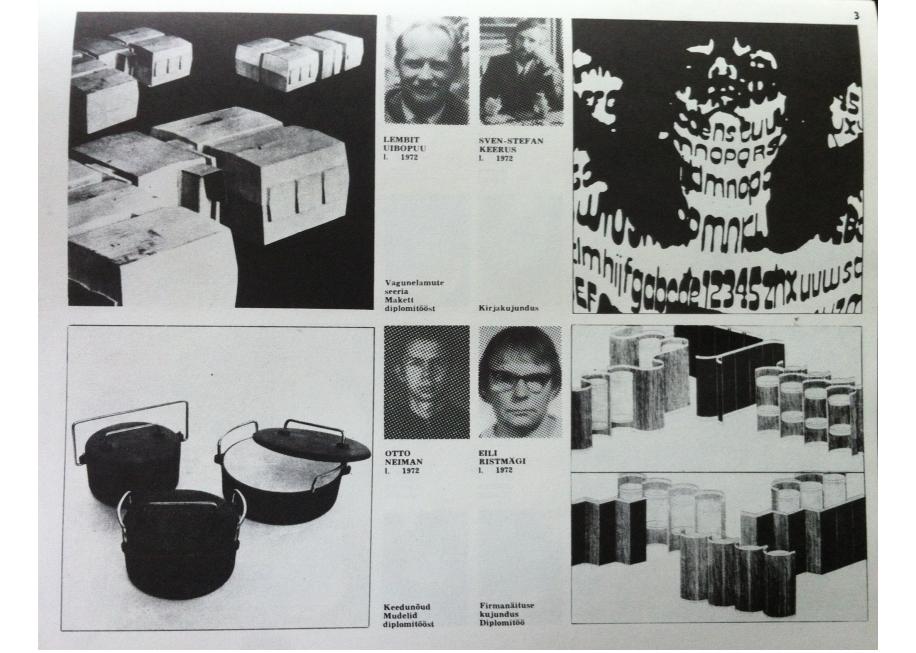
Harri Põlluaas



Villu Järmut



Kärt Summatavet & Leena Svinhufvud: Oral Histories of Designers
IOHA 2018 MEMORY & NARRATION, UNIVERSITY OF JYVÄSKYLÄ, FINLAND, JUNE 18–21, 2018



Kärt Summatavet & Leena Svinhufvud: Oral Histories of Designers
IOHA 2018 MEMORY & NARRATION, UNIVERSITY OF JYVÄSKYLÄ, FINLAND, JUNE 18–21, 2018



ANDO KESKKULA l. 1973



CAMPING

MiLligand Viit rahvusvahelisele noorsoolaagrile





ULLE TAAPON 1. 1973 Rinnamärgid MARJU LIIGAND 1. 1973



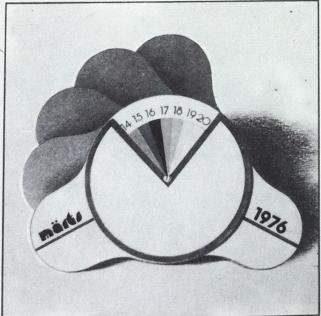
Almanahhi «Kunst» kujundus

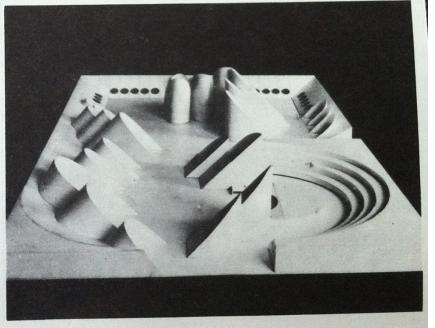


TAIMI SOO 1. 1973



Makett diplomitööst





Kärt Summatavet & Leena Svinhufvud: Oral Histories of Designers
IOHA 2018 MEMORY & NARRATION, UNIVERSITY OF JYVÄSKYLÄ, FINLAND, JUNE 18–21, 2018



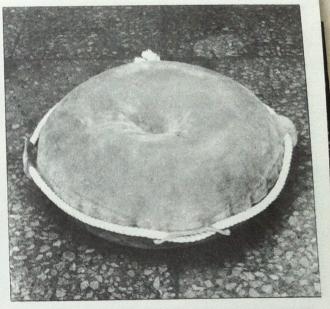
TALLINN 1980



LEONARDO MEIGAS



TIMUR SEIFULLEN



TV-tiitri kujundus



Pneumoiste Tööstusnäidis

ELLE

TALLING 1980

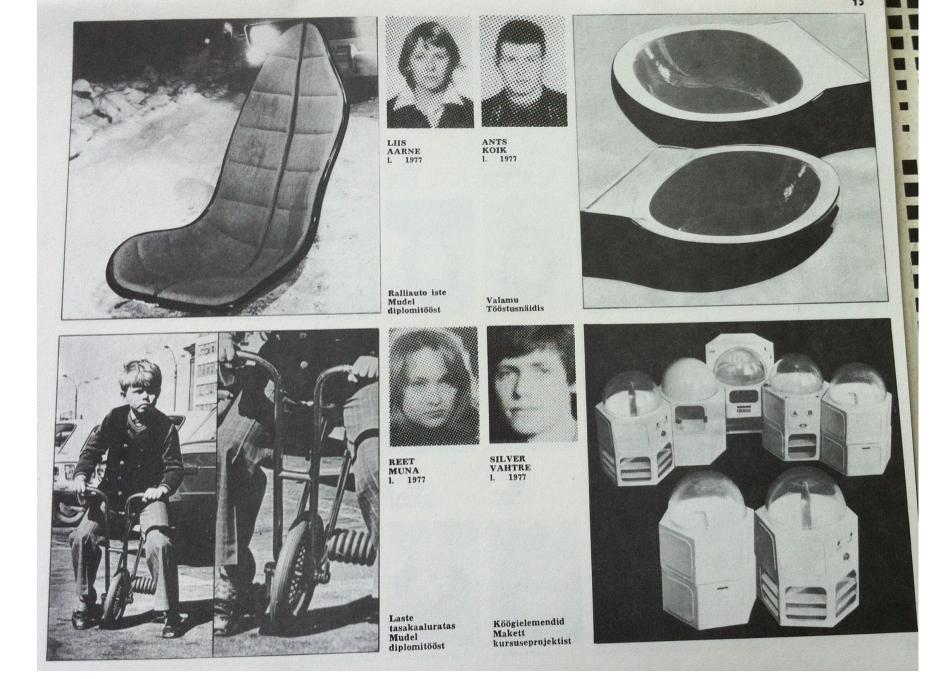


SILVI VIRKEPUU



Olümpiamärgi kujundus Detail diplomitööst

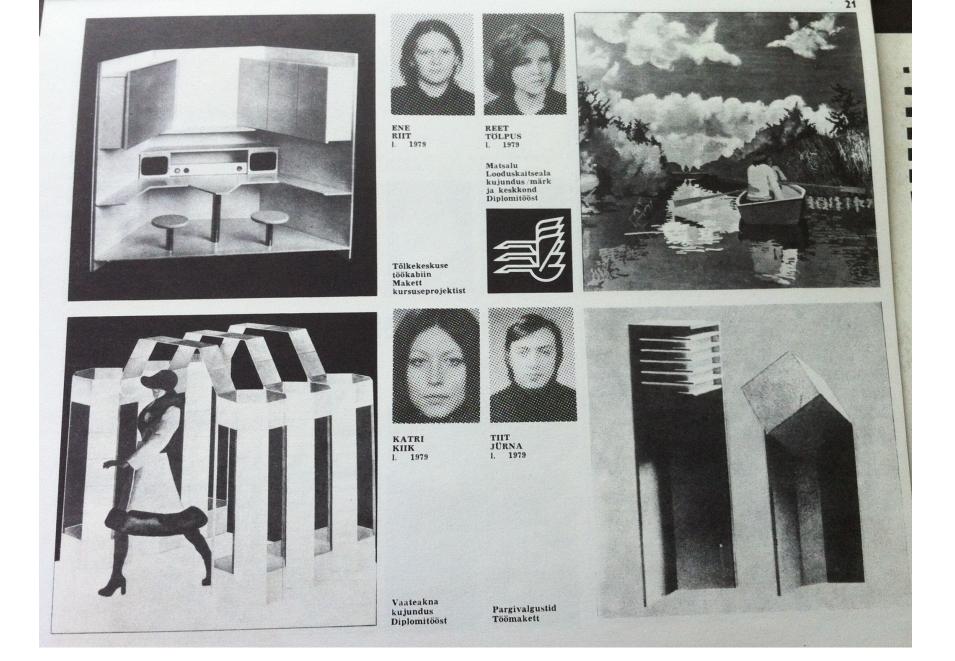
Hambaravikabineti sisustus Makett diplomitööst



Kärt Summatavet & Leena Svinhufvud: Oral Histories of Designers
IOHA 2018 MEMORY & NARRATION, UNIVERSITY OF JYVÄSKYLÄ, FINLAND, JUNE 18–21, 2018



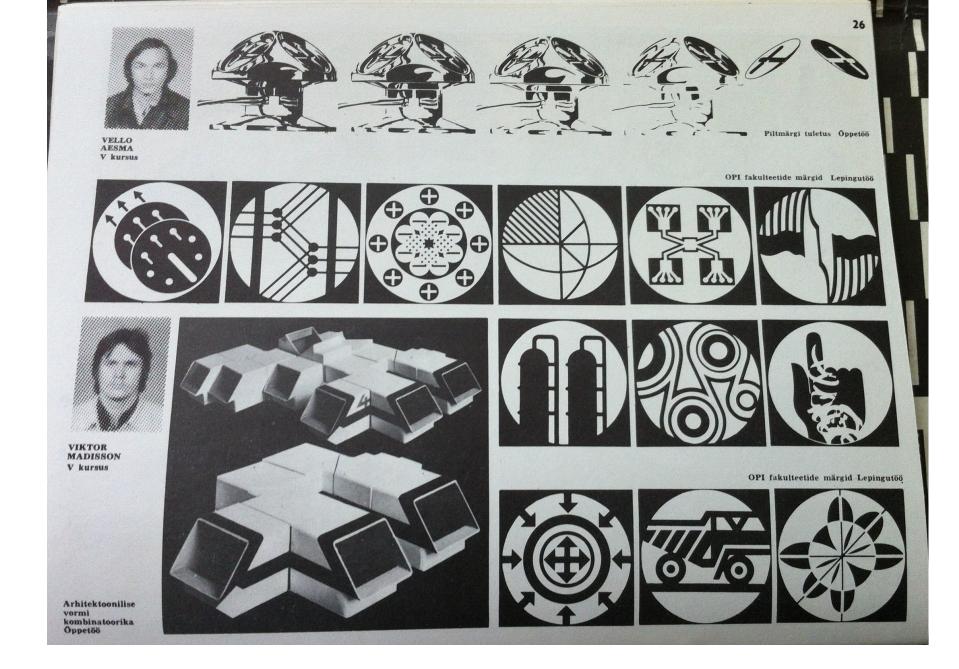
Kärt Summatavet & Leena Svinhufvud: Oral Histories of Designers
IOHA 2018 MEMORY & NARRATION, UNIVERSITY OF JYVÄSKYLÄ, FINLAND, JUNE 18–21, 2018



Kärt Summatavet & Leena Svinhufvud: Oral Histories of Designers
IOHA 2018 MEMORY & NARRATION, UNIVERSITY OF JYVÄSKYLÄ, FINLAND, JUNE 18–21, 2018



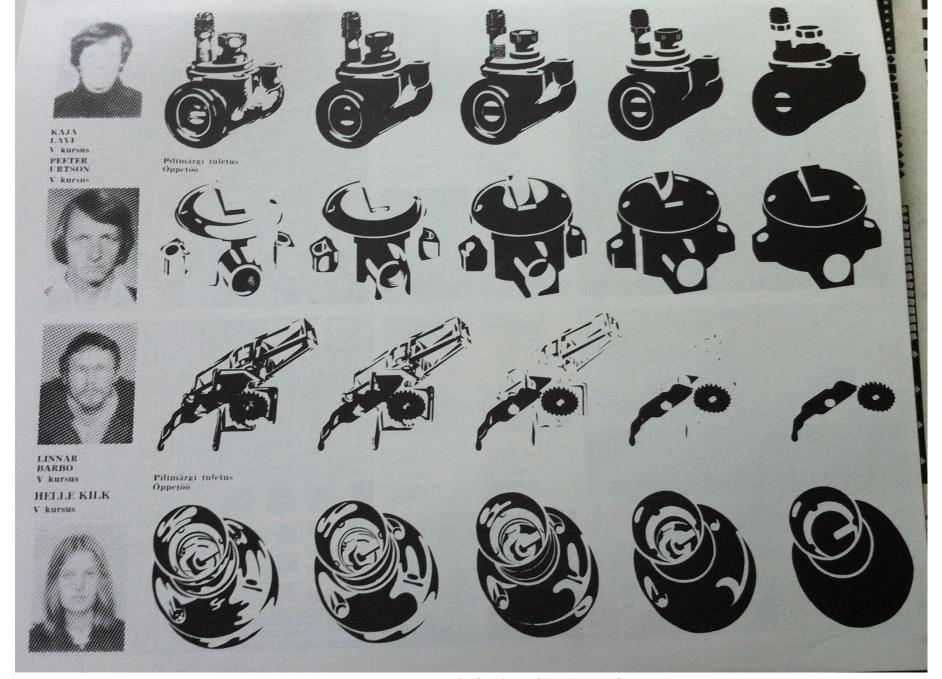
Kärt Summatavet & Leena Svinhufvud: Oral Histories of Designers
IOHA 2018 MEMORY & NARRATION, UNIVERSITY OF JYVÄSKYLÄ, FINLAND, JUNE 18–21, 2018



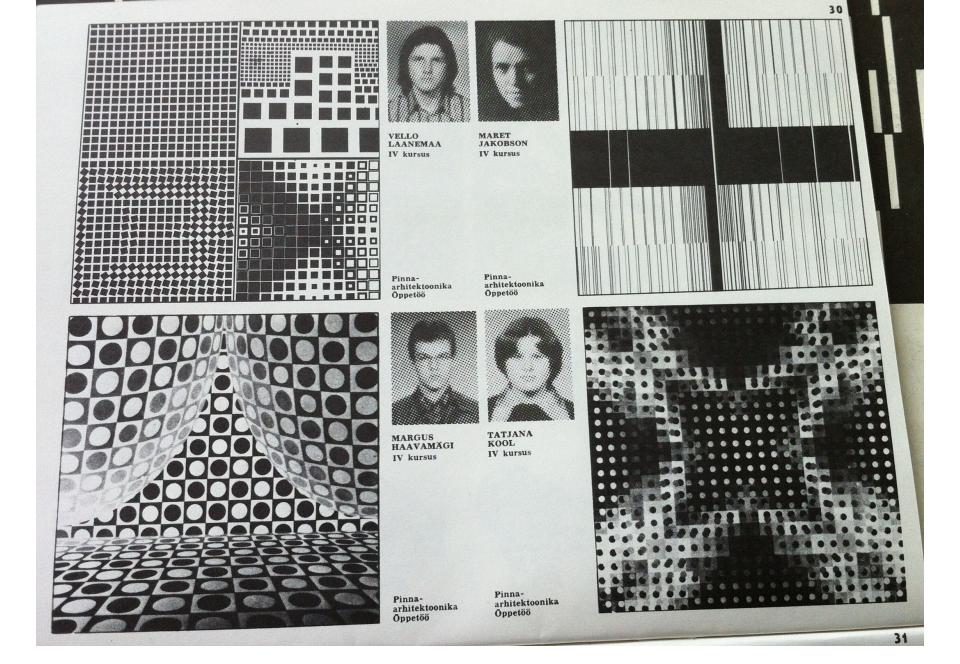
Kärt Summatavet & Leena Svinhufvud: Oral Histories of Designers
IOHA 2018 MEMORY & NARRATION, UNIVERSITY OF JYVÄSKYLÄ, FINLAND, JUNE 18–21, 2018



Kärt Summatavet & Leena Svinhufvud: Oral Histories of Designers
IOHA 2018 MEMORY & NARRATION, UNIVERSITY OF JYVÄSKYLÄ, FINLAND, JUNE 18–21, 2018



Kärt Summatavet & Leena Svinhufvud: Oral Histories of Designers
IOHA 2018 MEMORY & NARRATION, UNIVERSITY OF JYVÄSKYLÄ, FINLAND, JUNE 18–21, 2018





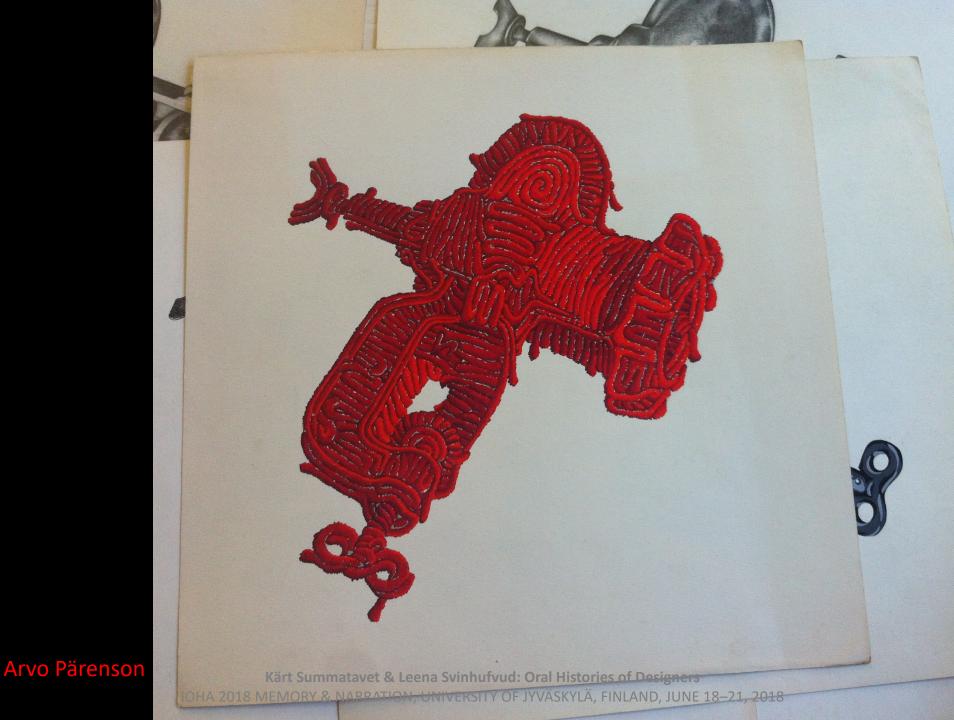
Kärt Summatavet & Leena Svinhufvud: Oral Histories of Designers
IOHA 2018 MEMORY & NARRATION, UNIVERSITY OF JYVÄSKYLÄ, FINLAND, JUNE 18–21, 2018

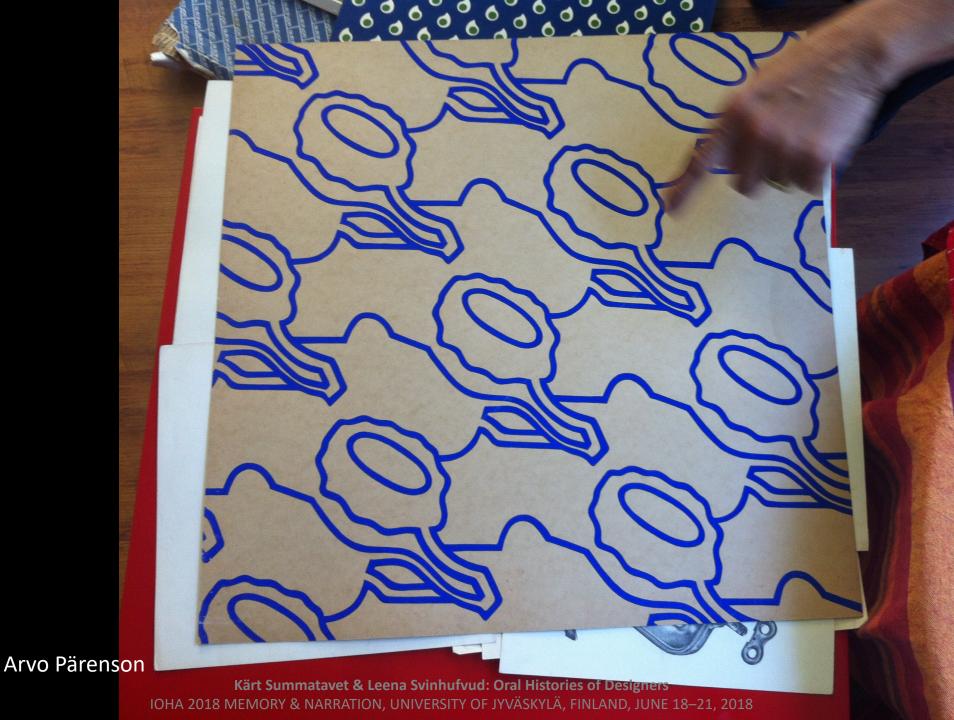


Arvo Pärenson 2016

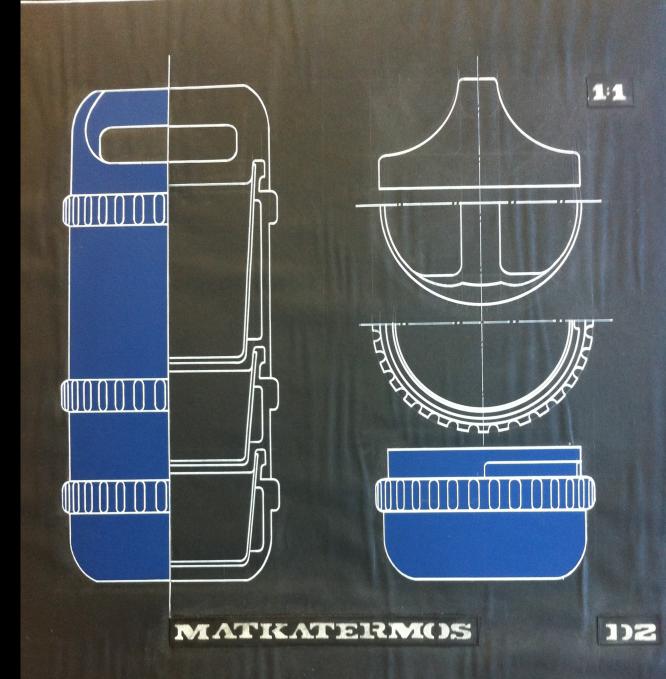
Kärt Summatavet & Leena Svinhufvud: Oral Histories of Designers
IOHA 2018 MEMORY & NARRATION, UNIVERSITY OF JYVÄSKYLÄ, FINLAND, JUNE 18–21, 2018





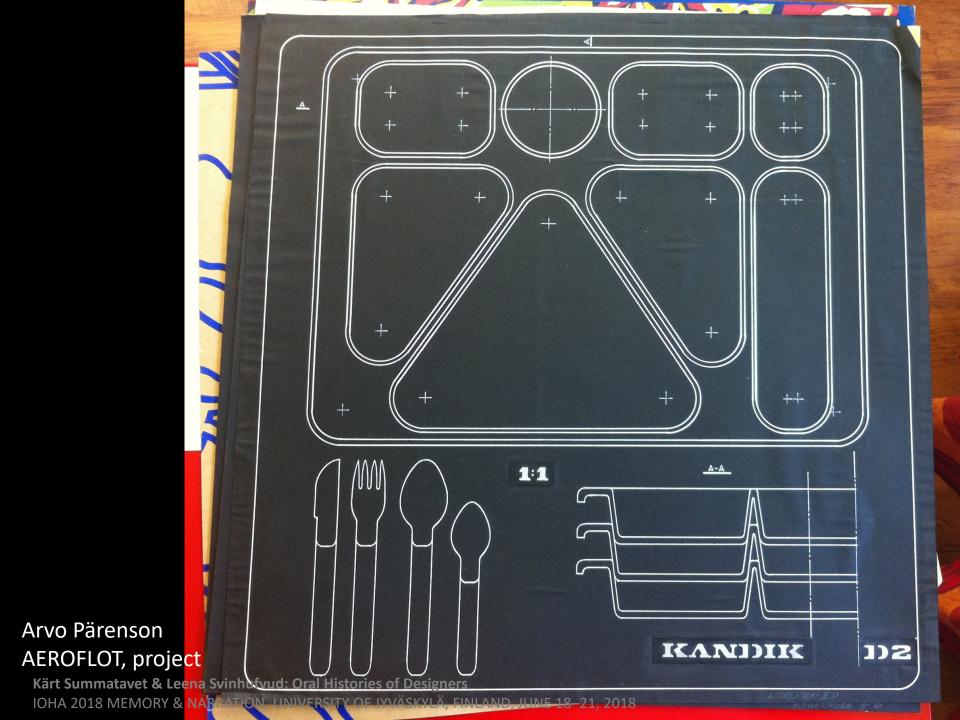


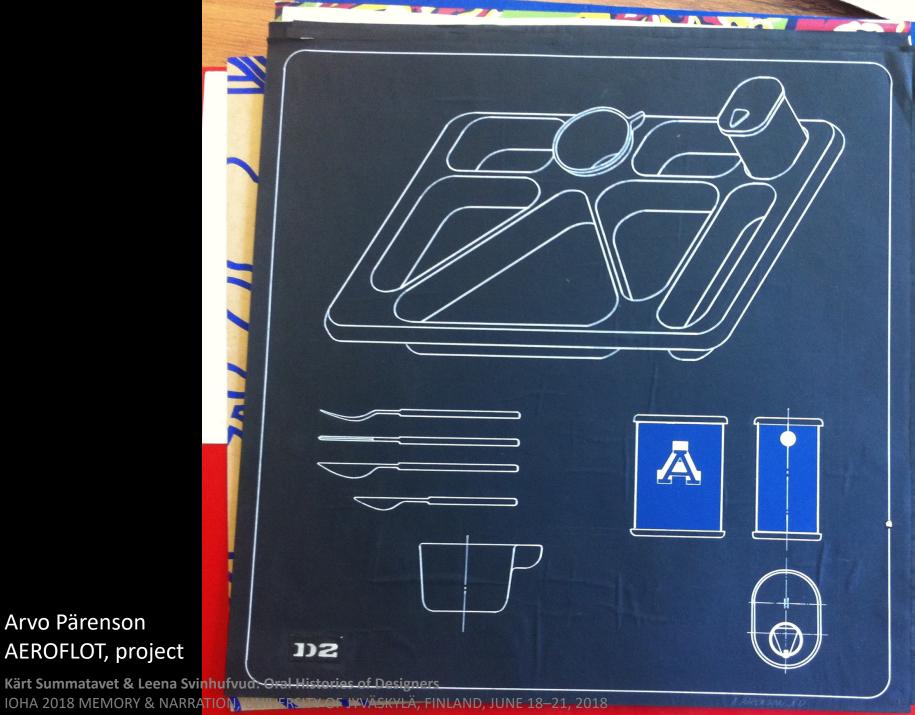




Arvo Pärenson AEROFLOT, project

Kärt Summatavet & Leena Svinhufvud: Oral Histories of Designers
IOHA 2018 MEMORY & NARRATION, UNIVERSITY OF JYVÄSKYLÄ, FINLAND, JUNE 18–21, 2018





Arvo Pärenson AEROFLOT, project

Kärt Summatavet & Leena Svinhufvud. Oral Histories of Designers





EESTI 200

design museum

helsinki



